

FUNDING A BORDER WALL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. O'ROURKE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Speaker, later this evening, perhaps early tomorrow morning, this body will be voting on a series of appropriations measures to fund our armed services and the VA. Tacked on to that, at the whim of the chairman of the Rules Committee, in what I can only describe as the most undemocratic, unrepresentative fashion, is a provision to fund a border wall between the United States and the country of Mexico to the tune of \$1.6 billion, a mere down payment on total construction costs which are estimated to be over \$20 billion.

I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, that we keep in mind some very basic facts; the first being that the border between the United States and Mexico has never been safer or more secure.

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Last year and the year before, we saw record-low levels of northbound apprehensions from Mexico. If you look at where we were in the year 2000, you had 1.6 million apprehensions from Mexico. Last year, you had a little over 400,000.

Do you know who so many of those apprehensions were? They were kids, young families, scared and frightened, leaving the most horrific brutality that we can imagine from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America, literally fleeing for their lives to this country, which is comprised of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and is the very foundation of our success. Apparently, this is who we are trying to wall off and protect ourselves from with this \$1.6 billion boondoggle.

We now see, in the last 4 years, that more Mexican nationals are leaving the United States for Mexico than are coming north from that country into ours. We have twice the Border Patrol agents that we did in 2001: 20,000 Border Patrol agents. Today, you and I, the American taxpayer, are spending \$19.5 billion a year.

We are long past the point of diminishing returns with this very precious public resource. We are trying to solve, Mr. Speaker, a problem that we don't have.

Case in point: the city that I have the honor of serving and representing, El Paso, Texas, is regularly ranked the top, the second, or the third safest city, not just in Texas, but in the entire United States, using FBI crime statistics as crunched by CQ Press.

We are the safest community, yes, because we have excellent local and Federal law enforcement, including the Border Patrol. But we are also the safest city because of, and not in spite of, the fact that a quarter of the people who I represent were born in another country, most of them in Mexico. They are not, Mr. Speaker, the rapists and criminals that then-Candidate Trump would have us believe that they are.

So, if there is no rational, logical, fact-based case for a wall, why in the

world would we be spending \$1.6 billion on this, instead of creating more jobs or ensuring that more Americans can see a doctor or that more kids can go to a great school with excellent public school teachers?

Here are some of the other consequences. There was excellent reporting in *The Texas Observer*, followed up by the *LA Times*, on the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. It is about 10 miles southeast of McAllen, Texas. It is the last refuge for the ocelot, for 400 different species of birds, bobcats, and armadillos.

They are planning to build the wall right through that refuge. That belongs to you, me, our families, and our descendants. That is our heritage that we are about to wall off and destroy.

We are dividing communities; we are diminishing our relationship with Mexico, who should be our closest partner; and we are making our communities, including El Paso and other communities in Texas, less safe, as we militarize them and as people who live amongst us question whether they can go to local law enforcement to report a crime, serve as a witness, testify in a case, or help contribute to the safety of our communities.

Let me bring this fact to your attention, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, in a Walmart parking lot in San Antonio, Texas, the bodies of nine dead immigrants were found in the back of a trailer. A tenth died later in the hospital.

Tuesday morning, in El Paso, three bodies, including those of children, were dredged out of the canal that joins us with Ciudad Juarez and Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, since 1998, 7,000 people—human beings—have died trying to cross into the United States. As we further militarize and wall up and make it harder for people to come as legitimate asylum seekers; refugees; folks who want to work in our economy; people who want to join their families, be with their moms, dads, brothers, and sisters, their children, we ensure greater suffering and death.

Mr. Speaker, we do not need a wall. We need comprehensive immigration reform. We need to treat each other with dignity and respect. That ensures our safety, security, and success.

VETERANS HOUSING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GALLAGHER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of veterans across the State of Wisconsin who have put themselves in harm's way to defend this Nation.

As citizens, we have a clear moral obligation to ensure that they are able to receive the quality care that they need, deserve, and earned. The Department of Veterans Affairs is predicated on this very idea.

Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, in my district, is a facility for homeless and at-risk veterans in northeast Wisconsin. Just last week, veterans housed there were notified the VA would no longer renew grants for housing programs, an action that will result in the closing of this facility by the end of the calendar year.

This unfortunate news has caused significant stress, uncertainty, and anxiety among the veterans community in northeast Wisconsin, and specifically among the veterans at King, who now face the possibility of homelessness.

We cannot let this happen. We would be abandoning our duty if we let this happen. That is why I was proud to co-author a letter with the Speaker of the House, PAUL RYAN, requesting answers from Secretary Shulkin on this vital matter.

While we await answers, we must continue to bring attention to the concerns of our veterans and remain committed to working together across the aisle to ensure that our veterans receive the housing and care they vitally need and care that they have earned.

GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM MEMORIAL

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, I had the honor last week of welcoming a group of American heroes who journeyed from northeast Wisconsin to Washington, D.C., aboard the Old Glory Honor Flight.

Generations of veterans, representing every major conflict since World War II, visited the very monuments that honor their courage and commitment.

Just as these vets visited their respective memorials, so, too, should the brave men and women who have served and continue to serve in the ongoing war on terrorism in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the war that I was fighting 8 years ago. They, too, should have something to honor their sacrifice.

Under current law, a war must be over for at least 10 years before a memorial can be built in its honor. That is why Representative MOULTON and I have introduced legislation that would allow for a global war on terrorism memorial.

This war is unlike any preceding it. It has no end date. There will be no victory date, no V-J Day. Threats continue to rise, and so the longest ongoing conflict continues. After 15 years, and over 6,800 American lives lost, there is still no end in sight.

This memorial is for the brave men and women who have died fighting, who continue to fight, and are still joining the fight against terrorism. If we are going to continue passing the torch from one generation to the next, we need to build this memorial so that future generations never forget their duty to do the same and to pass that torch.

FARM TECHNOLOGY DAYS

Mr. GALLAGHER. Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a driving force behind our economy and a way of life in northeast